

more common than hay fever. Surveys have also shown that dental problems cause children to miss more than 51 million hours of school and adults to miss more than 164 million hours of work each year.

This health care and dental care crisis bears down particularly hard on those who live in rural communities where there are few local health care centers and patients must travel many miles to seek the care that they need. Those living in inner-city neighborhoods also often have difficulty receiving the care they need because they lack health insurance and have no means to pay for regular doctors visits. As a result, far too many Americans do not have a primary care doctor or dentist and do not seek preventative care.

This means the only time they see a doctor is when their situation has become so advanced and so dire that they must seek treatment at a hospital emergency room. This is a result that is bad for patients, bad for doctors, and bad for American taxpayers.

Providing underserved patients with better access to primary care will allow doctors to catch problems before they become advanced and require invasive and expensive procedures. It will also, of course, benefit the patient—in many cases saving their lives. Studies have shown that patients with a primary care provider are far more likely to receive appropriate preventative care, need fewer prescription drugs, and spend less time in hospitals and emergency rooms.

The good news is that we have a program in this country that provides primary health care services to those who need it most. Forty years ago, Senator KENNEDY had the foresight to author legislation creating community-based health care centers that treat underserved patients. These centers, now called Federally Qualified Health Centers or FQHCs, provide high-quality primary health care for millions of Americans, regardless of their income.

In addition to treating those who have Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance, FQHCs primarily serve those who have no health insurance and charge fees on a sliding scale basis. That means that whether you make \$50,000 per year or \$15,000 per year, you will be able to afford treatment. No one who walks into one of these centers is turned away because he or she lacks payment.

In addition to providing the quality care that patients expect to receive when they visit their local doctor's office, these centers also make sure that patients are able to afford the drugs they need by providing them with significant discounts on their prescriptions. The centers also provide critical dental and mental health care—often offering the only available services for those in need.

FQHCs provide primary, dental, and mental health care that is not only high quality but also tailored to meet the needs of the local community. In

order to create an FQHC, Federal law requires not only that there be substantial community input in the development of the center, but also that a majority of the members on the governing board of directors are actual users of the facility.

In other words, those who know the most about the needs of their local community are responsible for overseeing the centers. It is a model that has been highly successful throughout the country, including my own State of Vermont, which has five of these health center organizations serving more than 10 percent of Vermont's population at 18 different locations.

These community health care centers serve as the family doctor for 16 million Americans in more than 5,000 communities across the country. Their success has been well documented with studies repeatedly showing that these centers are a highly cost-effective method for ensuring that underserved patients receive quality health care. In fact the Office of Management and Budget has reported that FQHCs use Federal taxpayer dollars more efficiently than any other federally funded health care program. In addition, studies have found that FQHCs save the Medicaid Program 30 percent or more in annual spending by providing preventative treatment that reduces the need for specialty care referrals and hospital admissions.

There are not many issues on which President Bush and I agree, but the importance of community health care centers is one area where we have found some common ground. The success of this program has earned support and praise from the White House, as well as members of this body on both sides of the aisle. With congressional support, over the past 5 years, nearly 900 underserved communities were able to establish or expand a health center, bringing the number of Americans served by these centers to more than 5 million patients.

Unfortunately, during that same period more than 800 centers were denied FQHC status, and the Federal funds that go with it, not because they were not qualified but simply because there was not sufficient funding to incorporate them. That is 800 communities throughout this country that are left desperately in need of the quality, low-cost preventative care that these centers provide.

Existing centers throughout this country are also in jeopardy. Over the past 2 years, Federal grant support for these centers has been reduced, threatening their ability to serve all of those in need.

It is for that reason that I introduced a bill yesterday, along with Senator LISA MURKOWSKI of Alaska, to increase Federal support for community health centers over the next 8 years and ensure that millions of Americans living in medically underserved areas receive the care they need. This legislation would start by authorizing a funding

level commensurate with our current need—an increase of \$575 million for the upcoming year and increases between \$400 and \$600 million for the following 7 years. That will provide enough resources to fund not only the backlog of the 800 approved but unfunded health centers, but also future applicants who meet the criteria for FQHC status. It would also make sure that existing centers are able to grow with the communities that they serve by giving them annual funding increases that are commensurate with the number of patients they serve and the increased costs they incur.

This legislation would also correct the unfair and outdated system these centers are forced to contend with for Medicare reimbursements. While health centers provide care to more than 1 million medically underserved Medicare beneficiaries, their Medicare payments are subject to an arbitrary payment cap that was established in 1991 and adjusted only marginally since. The result is more than \$50 million in lost Medicare reimbursement funds that health centers now are forced to find a way to subsidize. This legislation would eliminate the inaccurate payment cap and ensure that these centers are reimbursed fairly for the care they provide to seniors and disabled patients.

Finally, this important legislation would also ensure that our Nation's community health centers have the workforce they need by expanding the National Health Service Corps. Currently, health centers rely on the National Health Service Corps for more than 20 percent of their physician workforce. Unfortunately, last year, health centers experienced a 15 percent physician vacancy rate and a 19 percent dentist vacancy rate nationally. This legislation would more than double funding for the National Health Service Corps over the next 8 years in order to train and send more primary care doctors and dentists into rural and inner-city communities.

In the richest country in the world, no American should have to go without basic primary health care. Federally Qualified Health Centers serve as a lifeline for millions of low-income Americans, and we should build on their success by expanding this program for all those in need.

IDAHO'S PROUD WARRIORS

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure and is a tremendous honor to call attention to the brave and honorable soldiers of Company B, 1st Battalion, 183rd Aviation Army National Guard unit from Boise, ID. In a letter to Idaho Governor Butch Otter from Lieutenant Colonel S.G. Fosdal, stationed at Forward Operating Base Bermel in Afghanistan, Company B's highly respected and renowned reputation is made clear. The heroism displayed in support of Army special forces, Marine, and Afghan troops

along the exceedingly dangerous and remote border between Afghanistan and Pakistan was remarkable, commendable, and in every way worthy of note to this body. In a self-described "unusual letter," Lieutenant Colonel Fosdal praises the many accomplishments and reputation of Company B, calling them "proud warriors." I ask unanimous consent that Lieutenant Colonel Fosdal's letter, as part of my statement, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

EMBEDDED TRAINING TEAM 2-4,
3D MARINE DIVISION (REIN),
FPO AP, February 15, 2007.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR,
Boise, ID.

GOVERNOR OTTER, I apologize for this somewhat unusual letter, but I feel it's important to let you know about the selfless courage and exceptional performance of one of Idaho's National Guard units.

I'm currently deployed to a Forward Operating Base located on the Afghanistan's border with Pakistan. Our mission is to mentor the Afghan National Army battalion responsible for the Bermel District of Pakistan Province in one of Afghanistan's most remote and remote regions. Within days of our arrival last October we found ourselves in a 4-hour running gun fight through the mountains in response to an insurgent attack on an American convoy. We had less than a full company of Afghan soldiers but managed a significant victory largely due to the brave men of Company B, 1st BN, 183rd Aviation out of Boise, Idaho. Despite heavy ground fire and a chaotic battlefield they provided precise and timely fires against the enemy, killing many and saving the lives of Afghans and U.S. forces alike. On November 7th we found ourselves in another serious fight, this time with a wounded Marine and Afghan soldiers pinned down by enemy fire. Once again the men from Boise came to our aide—staying on station and working with the Marines on the ground to suppress the enemy and save the wounded. Lesser men would have declared the area too dangerous and flown away leaving us to fend for ourselves, but not Company B. They stuck with the troops in the fight and as a direct result of their heroic efforts a Marine is now at home with his family, healing and thankful to be alive.

There were numerous other occasions when the Afghans were apprehensive about venturing into steep valleys or mountain passes. I only had to mention to the Afghan Commander that the Apaches from Boise would be there and his response would inevitably be, "The helicopters that saved my life? We will win then. Come, we go now." This respect did not stop with the Afghans, the U.S. Army and Special Forces were also imbued with confidence knowing that your unit had their back. In my time on the border, I have not witnessed any other single unit that had the amount of respect and whose mere presence boosted morale like that of Company B.

Company B is now on its way back to Boise. I'm sure the awards have been written, welcomes planned and everyone is just eager to see their families and loved ones. I would only ask that if you have the opportunity, please thank them and let the citizens of Idaho know that they should be proud of these brave warriors. As a state rich in natural resources I thank you and the people of Idaho for sending your most precious resource, its citizens, to serve here in Afghanistan.

I hope that you are as proud of them as I am for having served along side them.

Thank you.

S.G. FOSDAL,
LtCol, USMC.

Mr. CRAPO. It makes me proud to hear fellow Idahoans described this way. Our military men and women from every State and territory continue to stand strong for freedom and uphold their solemn commitment to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America." This is simply my opportunity to thank and pay deep respect to the men and women of Company B, part of Idaho's esteemed military tradition, current and past. The steadfast commitment to duty, perseverance, excellence, and reliability are all traits that reflect the spirit of Idaho characteristics clearly articulated in respectful words of honor and thanks from a commanding officer. These soldiers and their families have sacrificed much to keep us free and keep terror and tyranny far from our own shores. On behalf of my family, I thank them all for their valorous service, heartfelt commitment, outstanding patriotism, and willing sacrifice.

HONORING THE INDY RACING LEAGUE

Mr. BAYH. Mr. President, today Senator LUGAR and I wish to recognize the Indy Racing League, IRL, for its decision to use 100 percent ethanol in its race cars and the impact that decision will have on ethanol's viability as a major fuel source for Americans. With its decision to use ethanol as the fuel for the IndyCar series, the IRL is leading the way to encourage greater public use of renewable fuels. If the world's fastest cars can run on ethanol, then there is no doubt that America's cars, trucks and SUVs can, too.

This year all of the IndyCars will race on 100 percent ethanol that is available right here in America—produced by American workers. With this change, the corn harvested on farms across the country will power the fastest cars in the world.

The ethanol that will power the IRL racecars will deliver the same high-performance capabilities that drivers rely on, only without harmful air pollution. It also represents an important step toward reducing America's dependence on foreign oil by providing a renewable energy source grown in our own fields. By tapping the energy potential of America's farms, we can ensure a reliable domestic energy supply to meet our Nation's needs, end our reliance on unstable countries like Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Venezuela, and create jobs for Hoosier farmers.

This Saturday, March 24, millions of Americans and sports fans from around the world will not only watch the opening race of the IndyCar Series and see first-hand the power of ethanol, but they will also watch the future of American energy unfold at 220 miles per hour.

Reducing our dependence on foreign oil is one of the great challenges of this generation, and the IRL is playing a key role in this effort by helping inform Americans about this important alternative fuel. Since 1911, Indiana has been the center of the auto-racing world, setting the standard in racing for drivers and fans alike. And now, the Indy Racing League is setting a new standard, this time for greater energy independence.

Earlier this year, we introduced the DRIVE Act, legislation that is supported by both Democrats and Republicans to reduce our dependence on oil by 7 million barrels per day in 20 years—more than twice the amount we currently import from the Middle East. It achieves this goal through a combination of steps, including increased use of ethanol, tax credits for manufacturers to produce advanced diesels, hybrid, and plug-in hybrid vehicles, and greater funding for the research and development of energy efficient technologies.

We applaud the Indy Racing League for leading the way in this effort and, along with thousands of other Hoosiers, look forward to this year's ethanol-powered races.

IN MEMORY OF SENATOR THOMAS EAGLETON

• Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to add to the praise of a great statesman and a great friend: Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri.

Those of us who knew Tom remember him as a man of nearly endless drive and boundless energy. Those qualities carried him to a career in Missouri politics unmarked by a single defeat: the youngest St. Louis circuit attorney, the youngest Missouri attorney general and Lieutenant Governor, U.S. Senator at the age of 39.

Tom spent his political career, as his hometown paper put it, as "a force of nature. He worked crowds with a fervor, sweating like a mill worker, chain-smoking Pall Malls, shaking hands, trading insults, telling jokes, remembering names and pet causes." As he conceded himself, "I campaigned myself right into the hospital."

Thankfully, Tom emerged to serve as one of the most eloquent liberal voices in Congress. His achievements should make his constituents proud and his fellow Senators a little envious.

He was crucial to the enactment of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, legislation that still forms the backbone of our environmental defense today.

Tom sponsored the amendment that ended American bombing of Cambodia and helped bring an end to the Vietnam war.

He was a longtime opponent of unchecked Presidential powers to wage war; and I am sure I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that we could sorely use his example and his counsel in the months ahead.